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2020-10-26

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Feriante J, Cintron M, Shayani A, Denietolis B, Lauer E, Cochran DM, Dvir Y, Rubin E. (2020). Supporting Family Members of Youth in Mental Health Crisis. University of Massachusetts Medical School Publications. <https://doi.org/10.13028/61w6-tn37>. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/publications/47>

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Supporting Family Members of Youth in Mental Health Crisis

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BACKGROUND

- *The Sibling Support Program: A Family-Centered Mental Health Initiative*, developed at the E.K. Shriver Center of UMass Medical School, addresses the impact of a youth's mental health challenges on typically-developing siblings and caregivers.³
- For siblings of children with psychiatric diagnoses, repeated exposure to traumatic events and maladaptive behaviors can lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.¹
- Siblings of children with psychiatric diagnoses commonly experience feelings of confusion, shame, parentification, overprotectiveness, insecurity and guilt from being the "healthy child."²
- Challenging family dynamics may transpire in which the child with the mental illness receives a greater amount of parental attention, leaving the needs of siblings partially unmet.²
- Many parents feel overwhelmed, ashamed, and deeply discouraged when a child's behavioral problems require psychiatric treatment.
- Many participating parents comment on their comfort level with receiving guidance from a skilled parent mentor who has "stood in their shoes".
- Research shows improved outcomes among children whose families engage in parent mentorship.²

There is a widely recognized lack of services for siblings of children with mental health needs. Siblings and caregivers benefit from specific interventions that build resiliency and decrease trauma. Those interventions constitute the framework of the Sibling Support Program: A Family-Centered Mental Health Initiative.

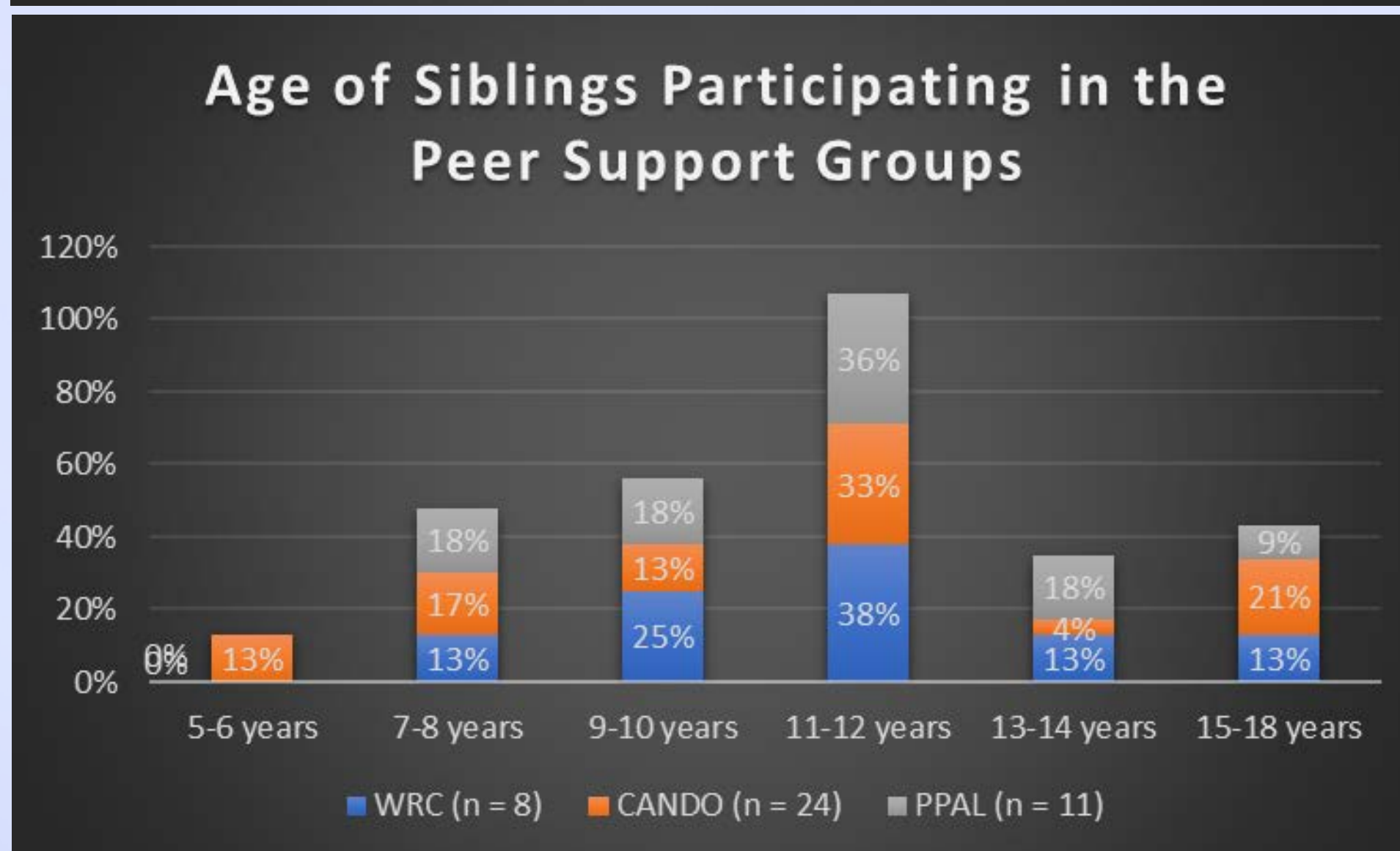
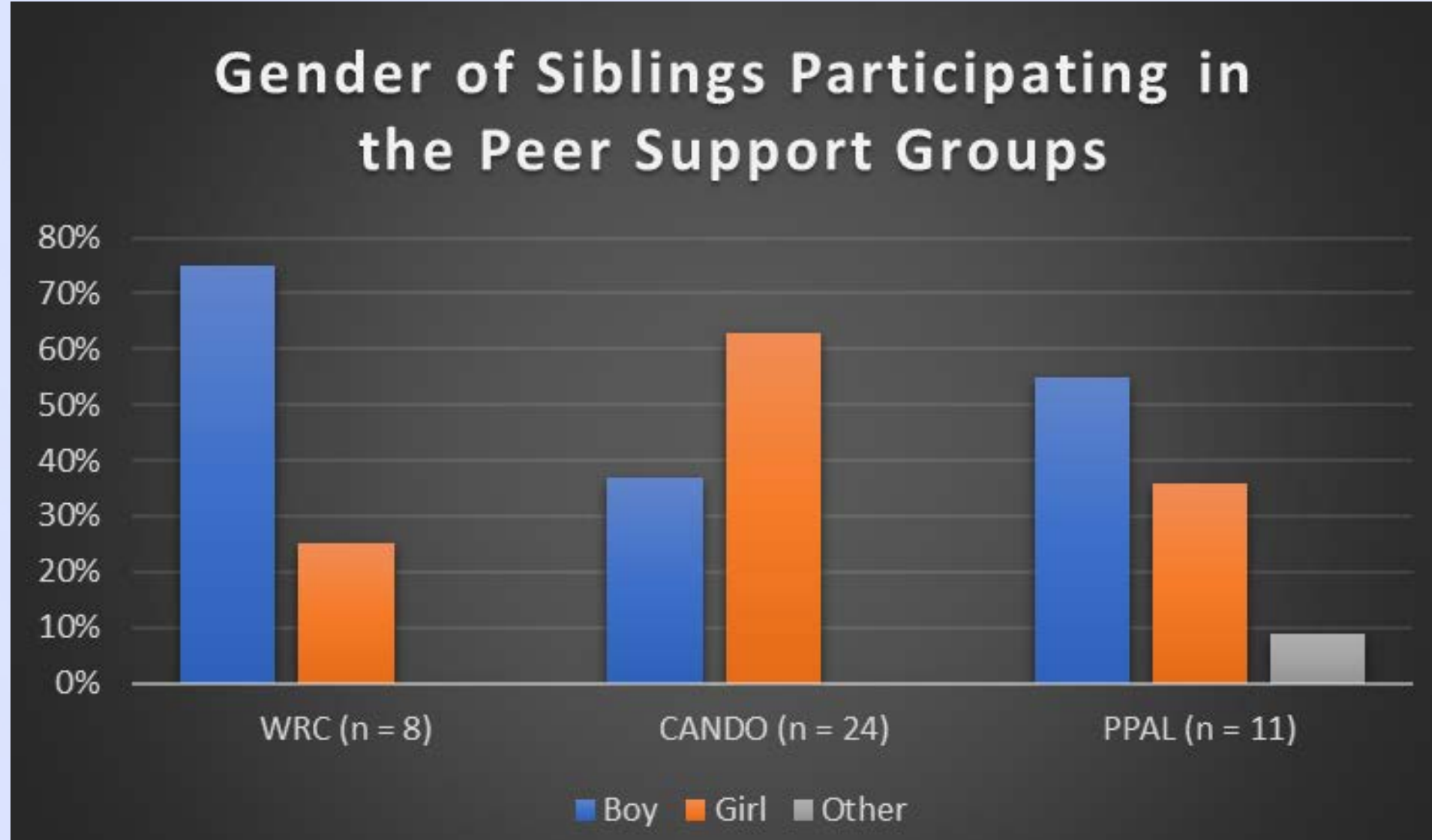
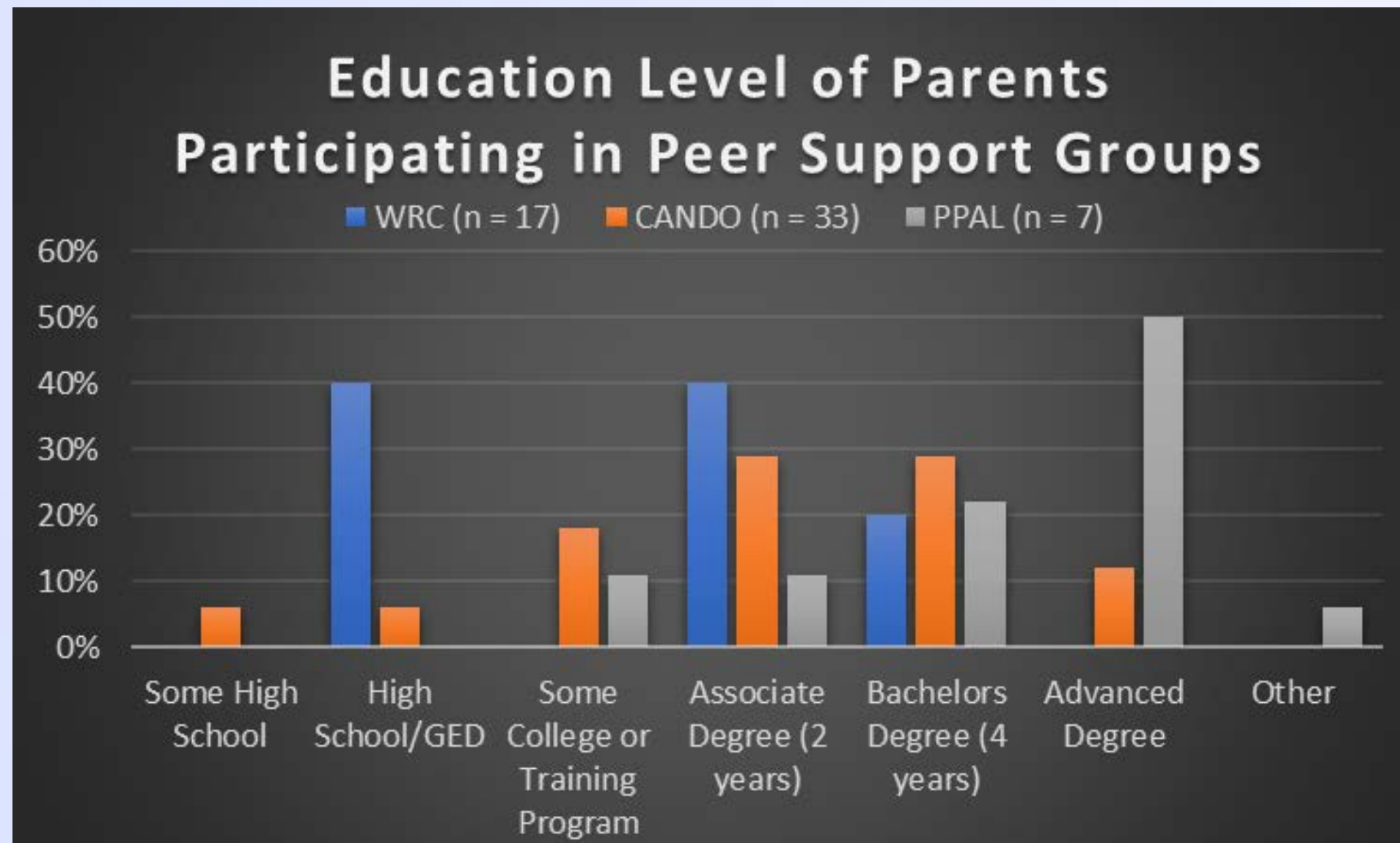
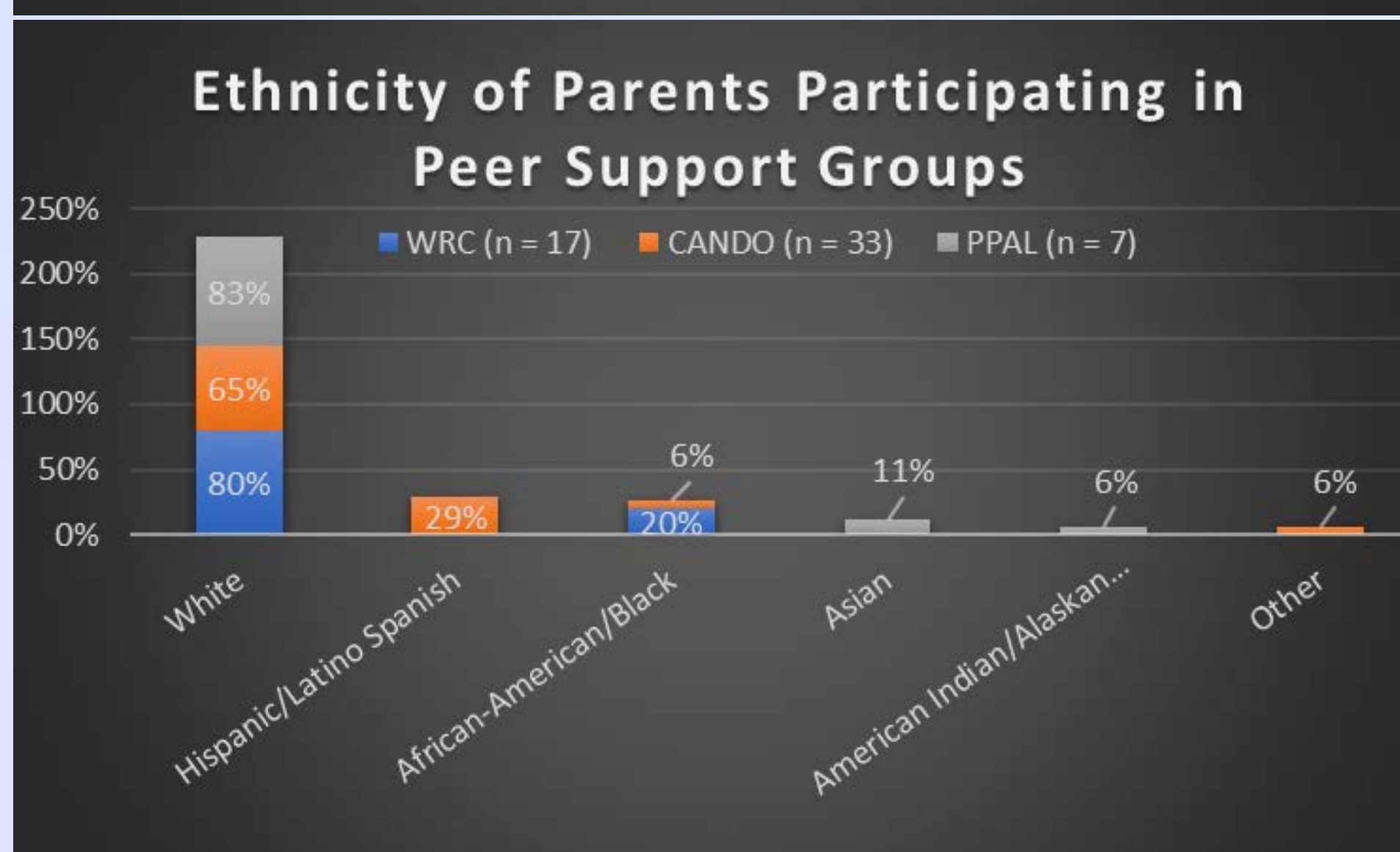
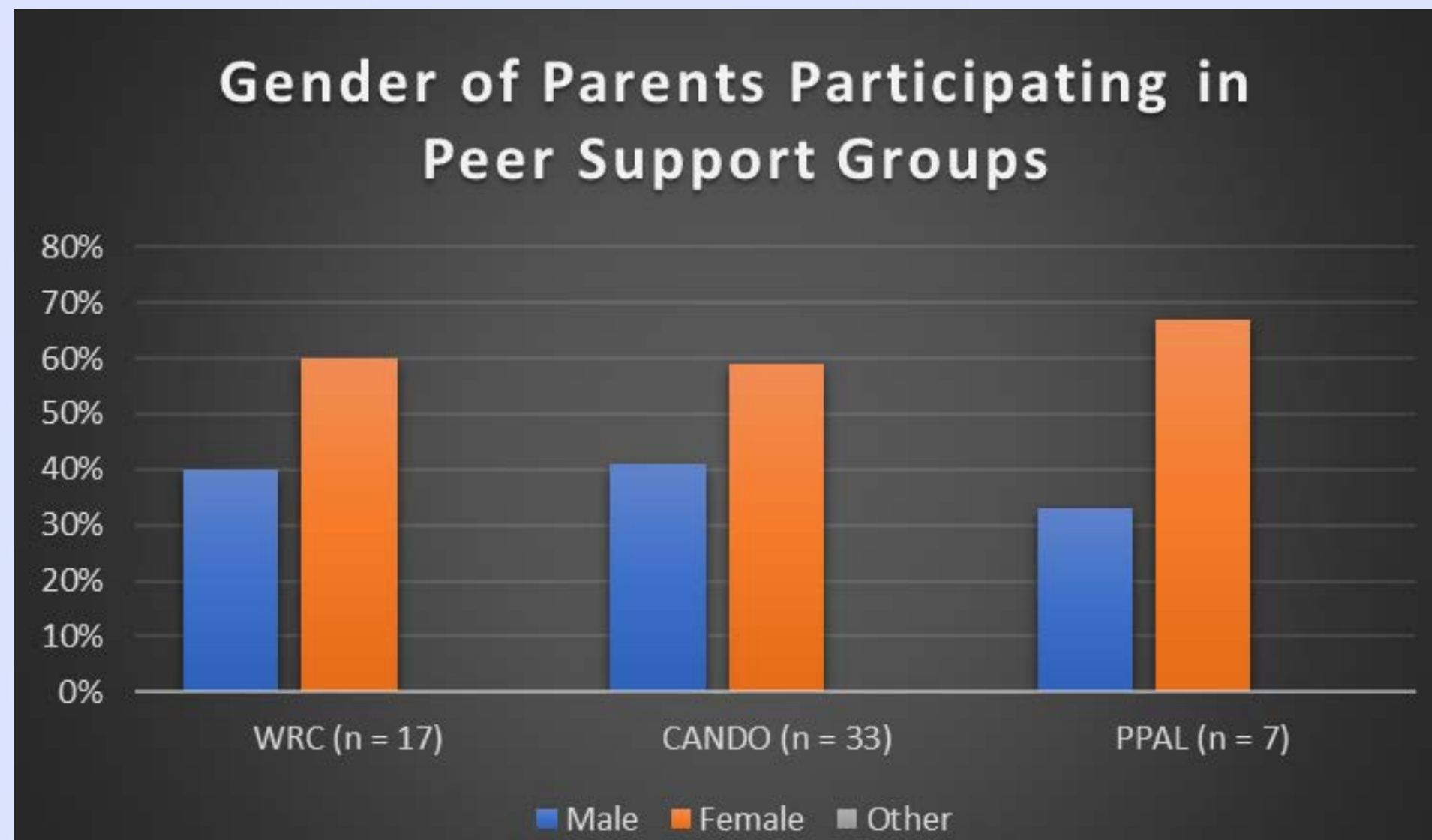
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- The Sibling Support Program: A Family-Centered Mental Health Initiative, an IRB-approved research study at Cambridge Health Alliance, was developed at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center of UMass Medical School in 2011.
- The principles of the program have been implemented at three sites in Worcester that provide graduated levels of care, ranging from residential to community-based:
 1. Continuing Care Units (CCU) at Worcester Recovery Center & Hospital (**WRCH**)
 2. Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders (**CANDO**) at UMass Medical School
 3. Community collaboration between the Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program (McPAP), the Parent/Professional Advocacy League (**PPAL**), and the department of psychiatry at UMass Medical School.
- The family interventions are divided into three groups:
 1. Peer support group for siblings,
 2. Psychoeducational group for parents and caregivers, and
 3. Follow-up group to reinforce family stability
- Participants meet peers in similar circumstances, learn about the impact of mental illness on siblings, are introduced to a range of coping strategies, learn about mental health resources, and can access support during a time of stress.

PROGRAM GOALS

1. Increase sibling resiliency and mitigate the trauma commonly experienced by siblings of youth with mental health needs
2. Build skills, competency, and confidence among caregivers
3. Build capacity among medical practitioners to provide family-centered mental health care
4. Help restore family stability
5. Minimize rates of hospitalization

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS



METHODS

Recruitment: Phone calls from parent mentors to caregivers.

Format: Concurrent sibling and caregiver meetings via Zoom.

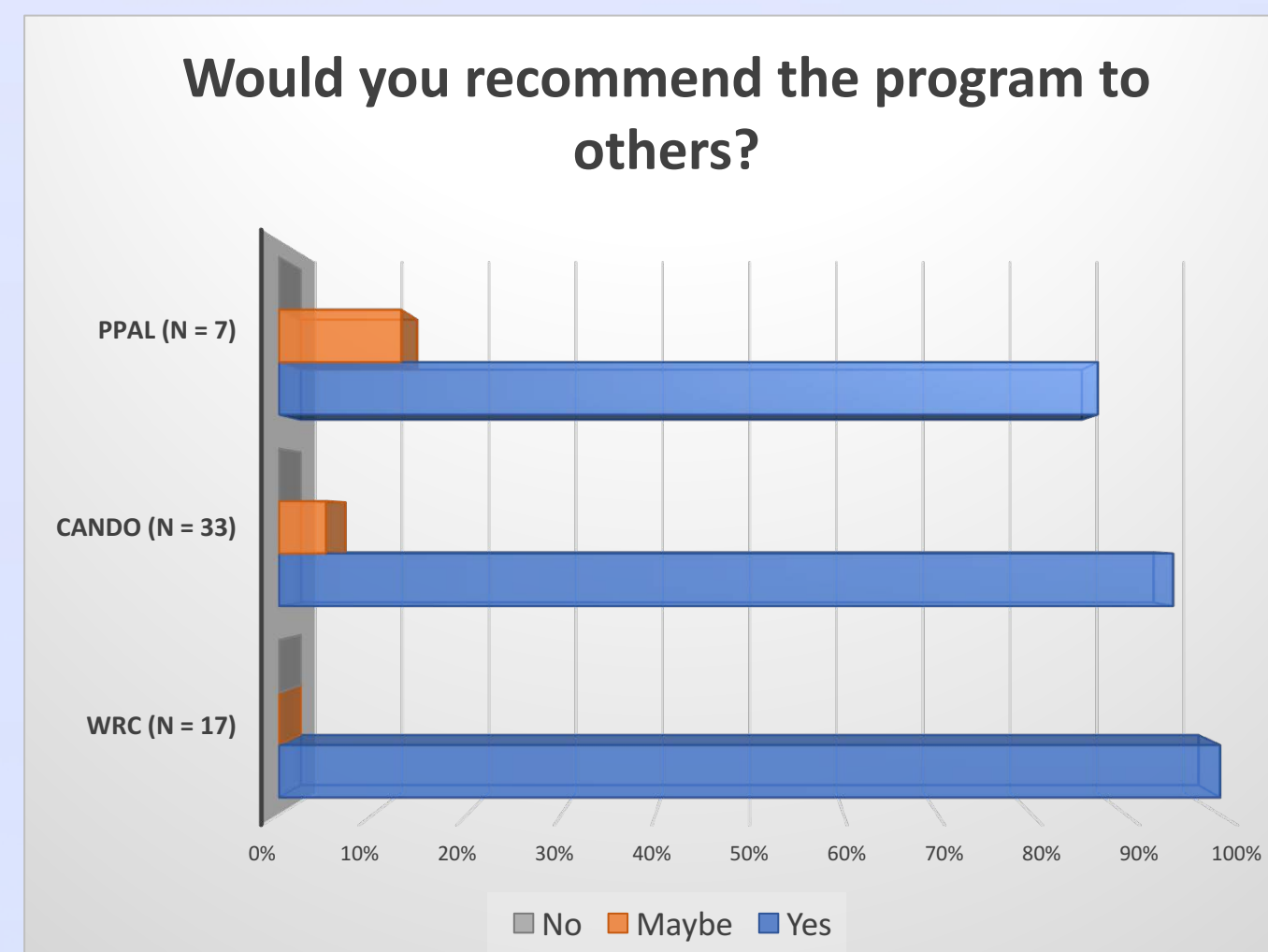
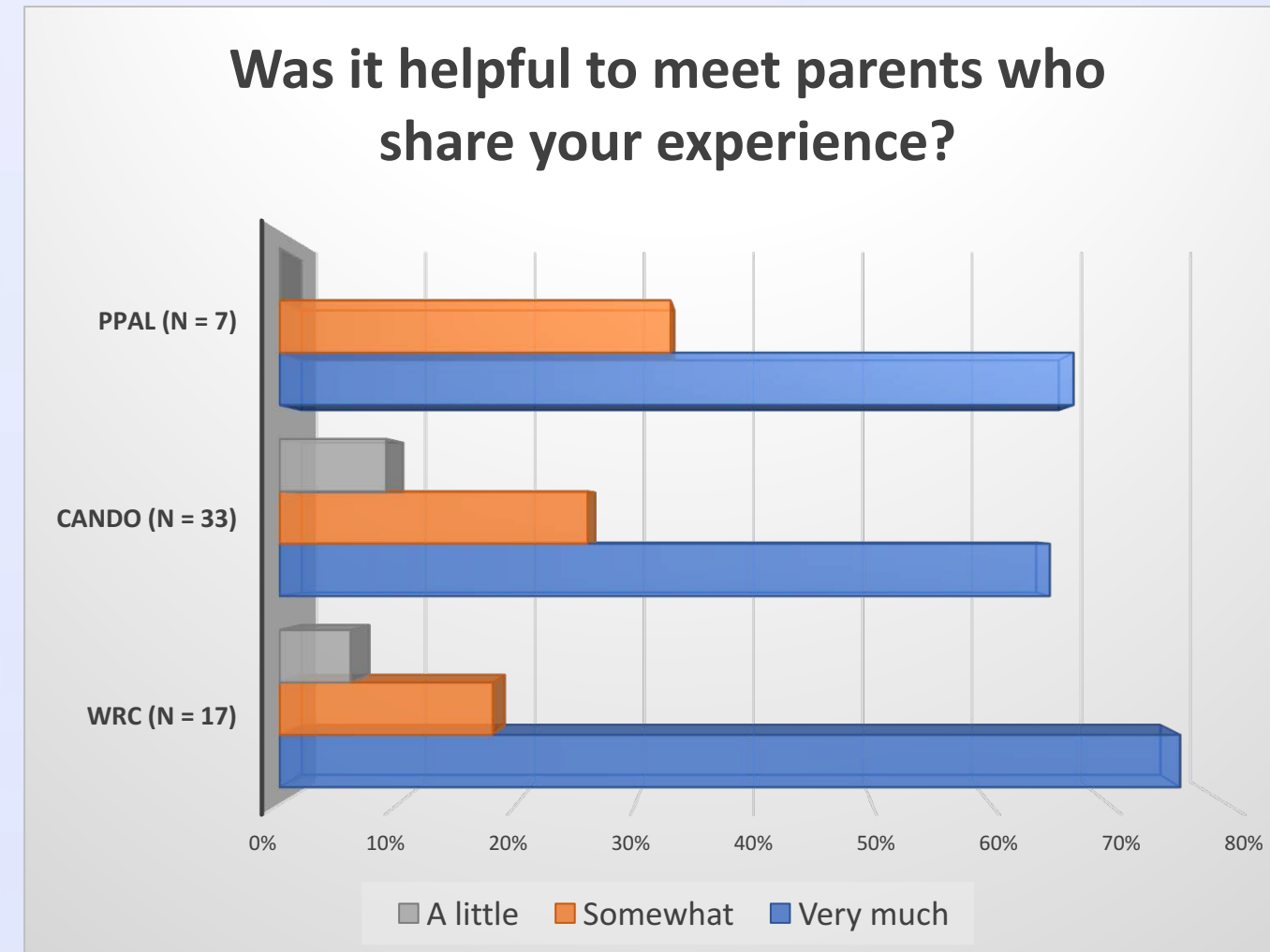
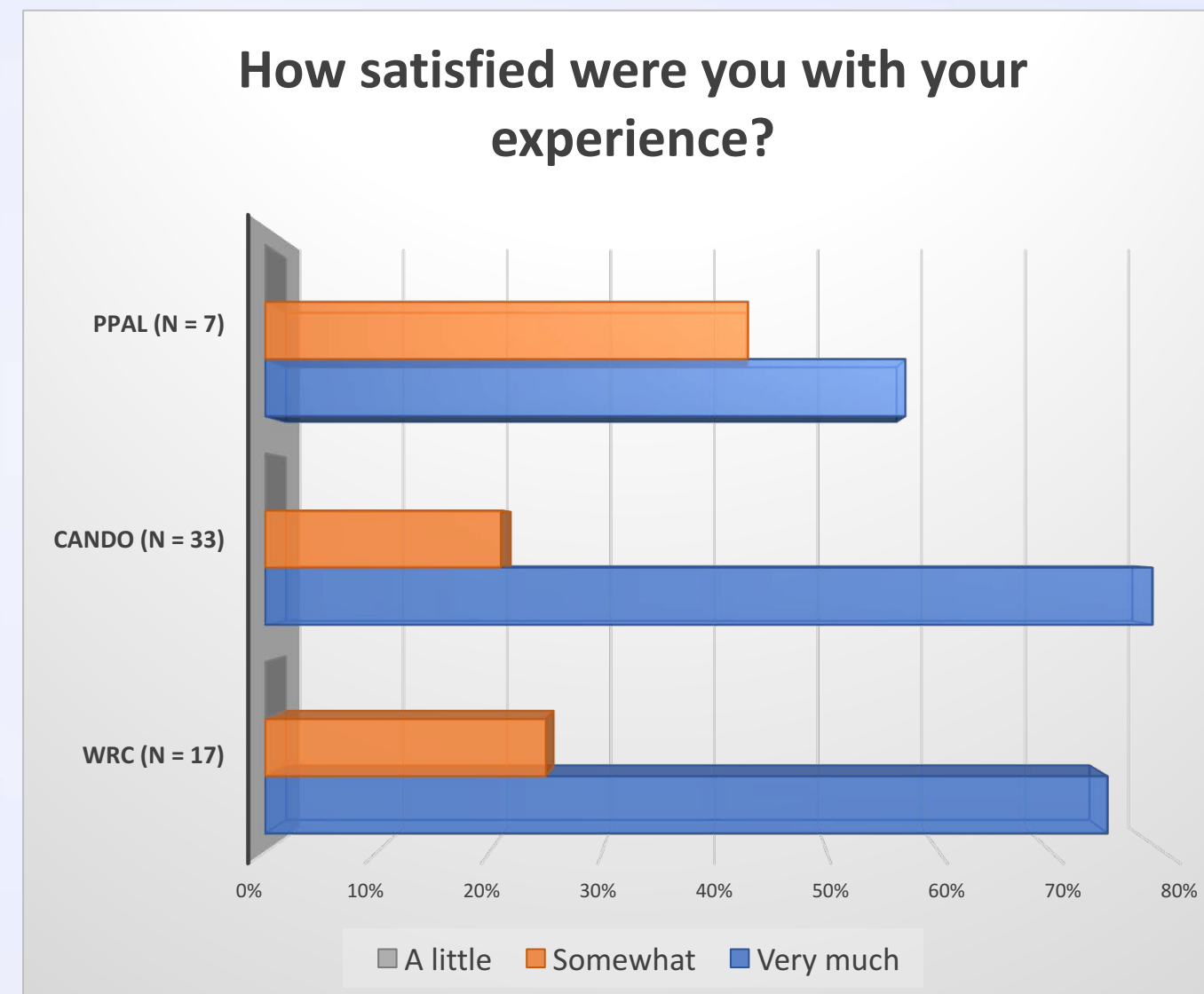
Data collection: Participants complete surveys following the intervention to report on knowledge learned, satisfaction level, and behavioral change anticipated by the participant.

Providers/Facilitators:

- Sibling Support Group: Led by mental health trainees. To prepare to facilitate, the group leaders undergo training that includes group observations and curriculum review with the Sibling Support Program Director.
- Parent/Caregiver Psychoeducation Group: Led by parent mentors. There is a growing body of research about the efficacy of parent mentors, particularly concerning mental health initiatives and patient outcomes.
- Follow-up Caregiver Group: Led by program director, a licensed social worker.

EVALUATION

Parent/Caregiver Survey Results

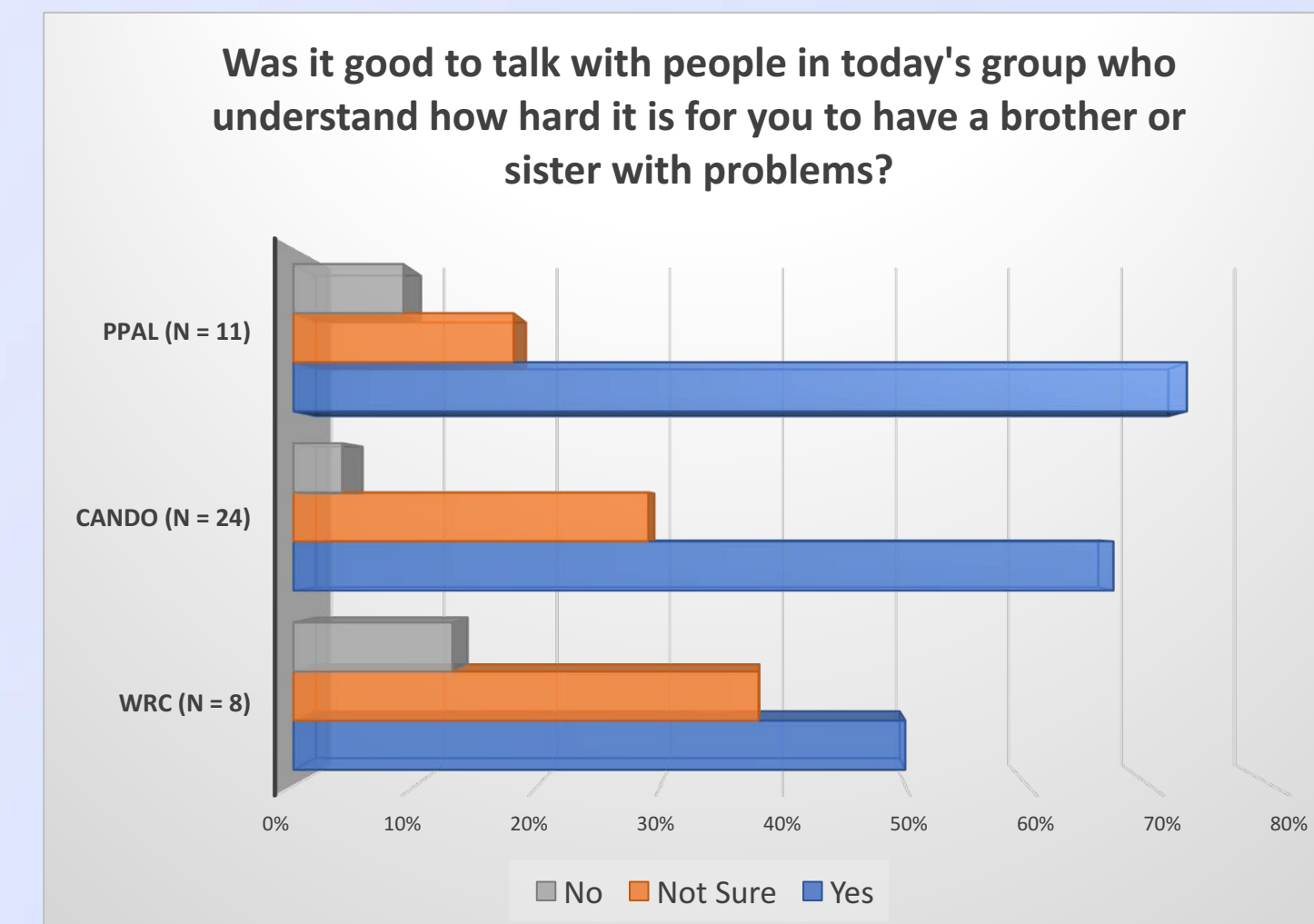
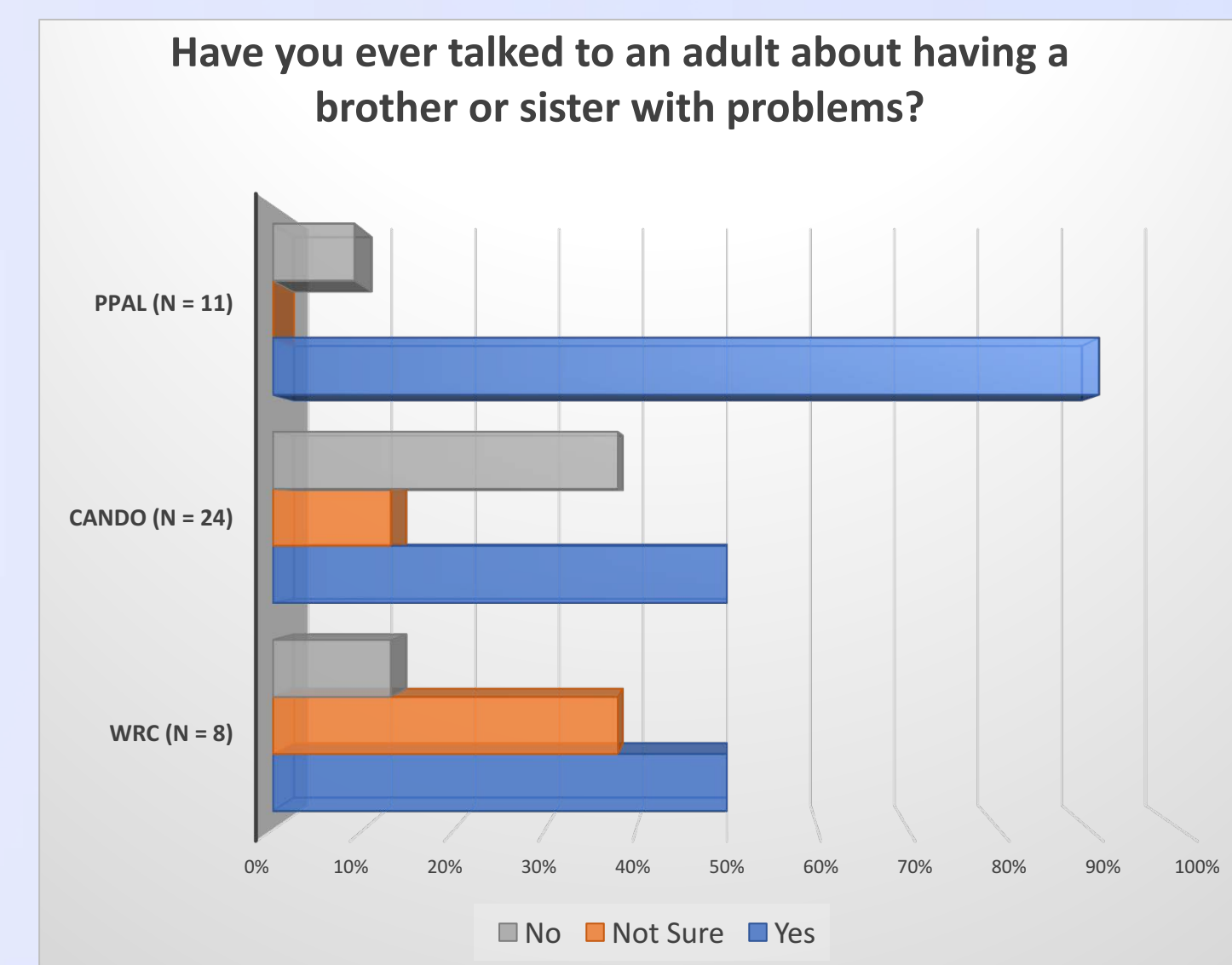


Quotes from parents/caregivers participating in the peer groups:

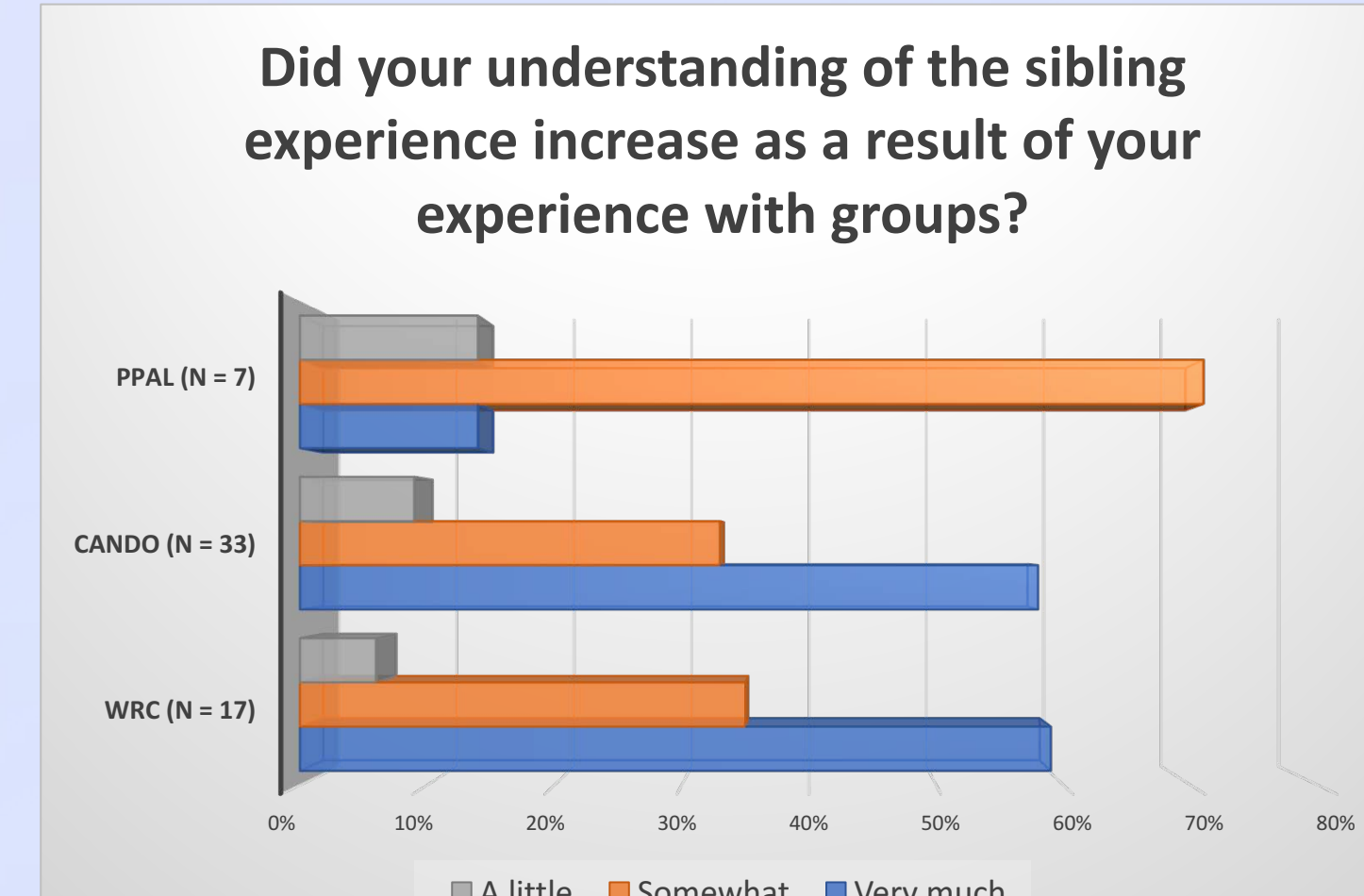
"I learned I need to go further than merely explaining behavior, and make sure the sibling knows she does not bear responsibility for either cause or care."

"I felt there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

Sibling Survey Results



The box below reflects caregiver responses:



Quotes from siblings participating in the peer groups:

"I learned that I'm not alone and there are others in the same boat as me."

"The most helpful part of the group was saying what is happening to my sister and being understood."

PARTICIPANT IMPACT

Impact on Parents/Caregivers

Qualitative data show that parents/caregivers:

- ➔ Gained useful parenting strategies and techniques to support siblings in the family.
- ➔ Reported having learned about numerous resources they were previously unaware of and stated their intention to seek out these resources.
- ➔ Indicated that the emotional support provided by the support group was significant.
- ➔ Believed the combination of emotional support and resources provided motivation and hope at a time when many felt deeply demoralized.

Impact on Siblings

Participating siblings reported:

- ➔ Feeling happy, relieved, and/or less alone to have met other young people who understood their experience of growing up with a brother or sister with mental illness.
- ➔ Indications they were beginning to internalize the messages of the support group: they were not to blame for their brother or sister's illness.
- ➔ Learning about their brother or sister's situation and discussing coping strategies was important.
- ➔ The support group was a stark contrast to their everyday situations: a safe, calm place where they could relax and even have fun.

SUMMARY

- Findings show that regardless of the severity of a child's mental health challenges, as evidenced by the level of care the child receives, family members display a similar need for support.
- This innovative program utilizes parent mentors and trainees to deliver interventions, with high satisfaction scores among participants.
- Results suggest that a child's mental health challenges can be traumatic for family members, and that sharing stories and being introduced to coping skills can help alleviate the stress and anxiety related to living with a child with mental health issues.
- The program serves as a unique training opportunity for psychiatry residents and other mental health professionals at UMMS.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the Fairlawn Foundation Fund at Greater Worcester Community Foundation, the FAR Fund, the Sidney R. Baer, Jr. Foundation, and the John Leopold Weil & Geraldine Rickard Weil Memorial Charitable Foundation, Inc. for their support. We also wish to thank the many families that shared their stories and experiences with us.